



ESSEX PLANNING COMMISSION

REGULAR MEETING

Thursday, March 10, 2016

7:30 p.m.

Essex Town Hall – Meeting Room A

DRAFT MINUTES

1. Call to Order and Seating of Members

Chairman Alan Kerr called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. In attendance were Members Ralph Monaco and George Sexton. Seated for Member Tom Danyliw was Gary Riggio, and seated for Member John Bairos was Jane Siris. Also in attendance were Alternate Erin Bogan, First Selectman Norm Needleman, Tree Warden Augie Pampel, and Town Planner John Guskowski.

2. Approval of Minutes: February 11, 2016

Motion to approve minutes of February 11, 2016 by Ralph Monaco, seconded by George Sexton. Chairman Kerr noted that the word “updated” in paragraph 2 of page 3 should be properly read “update.” Motion carried unanimously.

3. New Business

a. Discussion with Tree Warden Augie Pampel

Chairman Kerr welcomed Mr. Pampel and discussed the Implementation Matrix of the Plan of Conservation & Development (PoCD) and invited him to update the Commission on his activities and potential areas of coordination. Mr. Pampel discussed the recent and planned work in the West Road/Rte. 153/Rte. 154 gateway area, including the planting of cedars along West Road to screen the Fire Station and energy substation, and the funds provided by the Essex Foundation for additional landscaping in the State ROW in the area of the Route 9 overpass. The Tree Committee is working with the DOT and Landscape Architect Matt Verry on a design of low-maintenance, local plantings that will not create public safety concerns, such as dogwoods and viburnum. First Selectman Needleman stated that the painting of the overpass should take place in March or April, and planting will take place following that.

Chairman Kerr inquired about the plantings in Ivoryton Center, and Mr. Pampel replied that they're all in place. First Selectman Needleman stated that the central “sculpture” component has not be finalized and a temporary tree has been planted in that area.

John Guszkowski discussed the relationship of the Route 9-area plantings to a UConn Landscape Architecture study in the area, and Mr. Pampel stated that he would share design plans when they were available.

Mr. Pampel discussed his approach to street trees, seeking to replace any removed street tree with a low-maintenance, appropriate new tree. He discussed his budgetary allocation, application to the America the Beautiful Foundation for grant funding, and coordination with Eversource on tree removal. He offered some thoughts about expanding the role of the Tree Committee to consult on potential planting/design plans for current or future municipal property. He finally discussed the current and increasing concerns of the Emerald Ash Borer pest that would be threatening Essex's ash trees. John Guszkowski noted two Main Street projects in Centerbrook that will require coordination between Mr. Pampel and the Planning Commission and Town staff. Mr. Pampel thanked the Planning Commission for their support in the PoCD.

4. Old Business

a. Plan of Conservation & Development Implementation

John Guszkowski presented updates and reports on several of the implementation items identified by the Planning Commission for follow-up. On the topic of Traffic Authority/Transportation Planning, he reported that he reviewed the existing Traffic Authority ordinance and those of similar small towns, and that the scope of the Traffic Authority was quite limited, involving mostly stop signs and parking enforcement. A larger question, and perhaps the more appropriate focus of the PoCD, would be transportation planning and investment in improvements. First Selectman Needleman discussed the Public Works budget, which is largely maintenance-based with some funding for new sidewalk construction. Larger transportation improvements need to be funded by grants or specific sinking funds, and welcomed the input of Planning on those matters. He agreed that the narrow focus of the Traffic Authority lent itself to maintaining the current structure, as the Board of Selectmen.

Chairman Kerr led a discussion of recent traffic initiatives, including the new stop sign on Main Street in Ivoryton, and First Selectman Needleman discussed that sign, the speed monitoring signs, police force size and enforcement, and other priorities. He stated that for future investments, such as sidewalks on Westbrook Road or Plains Road, intersection redesigns, etc., both the Planning Commission and the EDC should be involved.

On the topics of Affordable Housing and Zoning Updates, John Guszkowski noted that the Essex Station application was undergoing a public hearing process, and that the Zoning Commission had not responded to the Planning Commission's request for involvement and inclusion in Zoning revisions. Chairman Kerr led a discussion about the challenges of coordinating between a split Planning and Zoning Commission and solicited input as to what the Planning approach should be. John Guszkowski suggested involving the Partnership for Strong Communities and the HOPE Partnership in public information regarding affordable housing, perhaps after the Essex Station matter is resolved. Chairman Kerr suggested that the Commission could give Zoning another month to reply to Planning's request, and then begin development of Zoning Amendment applications to address specific concerns such as accessory apartments, design standards, and affordable housing. Erin Bogan suggested that a joint meeting between Planning and Zoning would help facilitate coordination and progress. First Selectman Needleman volunteered to host and convene that meeting. Jane Siris discussed

the concern about overbuilding for the market and the possibility of underutilized developments. First Selectman Needleman discussed the great power that Zoning regulations hold over economic development and growth in Town. Chairman Kerr noted that the Commission was in agreement that following the next Zoning Commission meeting, if no response or invitation was pending, the Planning Commission would start identifying specific Amendment proposals, and would welcome First Selectman Needleman's invitation to convene a joint session.

John Guszkowski noted that the Wastewater Facilities Management Plan funds were in place and that an RFP for consultants would be advertised in the next month or so. The WPCA welcomed Planning involvement in the process. Chairman Kerr asked about Brownfields, and John Guszkowski noted he had researched grant opportunities and was discussing appropriate properties for assessment and redevelopment planning with First Selectman Needleman.

b. UConn Landscape Design Project

John Guszkowski updated the Commission about his interaction with the UConn students, and their meeting with Kevin Dodd at the Steam Train. The students had started with preliminary concepts based on the Steam Train expansion/master plan, and a smaller group of students will develop these concepts and expand beyond the Train property to encompass the wider Gateway area. This project will continue through the semester.

5. Report of Committees and Officers

a. Report from Inland Wetlands Representative

The Planning Commission has no active representative to the Wetlands Agency. Chairman Kerr requested a volunteer to serve.

b. Report from RiverCOG Representative

Alan Kerr stated that he had been unable to attend the last meeting, and asked for a volunteer to serve as the COG representative. He stated that he would continue to serve until a replacement was selected.

c. Report from Economic Development Commission Representative

The Planning Commission has no active representative to the EDC. George Sexton volunteered to serve in this capacity, and John Guszkowski stated he would connect Mr. Sexton with Susan Malan, the EDC Coordinator.

d. Chairman's Report

Chairman Kerr had no further report.

e. Planner's Report

John Guszkowski reported that there would be a Public Information Meeting on the replacement of the Walnut Street Bridge on March 22, and that design plans were proceeding well, but the construction of the new bridge would probably not occur until Spring/Summer of 2017. He also reported that the Safe Routes to School sidewalk

renovation project in Centerbrook would most likely be going out to bid by the end of the month or early April.

6. **Correspondence & Invoices**

Chairman Kerr noted the invoice from Dzialo, Pickett & Allen regarding legal fees for the Hunter's Trail Extension subdivision.

Motion to approve payment of invoice by Ralph Monaco seconded by Gary Riggio. Motion carried unanimously.

7. **Adjournment**

Motion to adjourn by Ralph Monaco, seconded by Jane Siris. Motion carried unanimously.
Meeting was adjourned at 9:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John Guskowski
Consulting Town Planner

RECEIVED FOR RECORD
03/11 20 16 at 1:30 P.M.
Janice M. Logie
ESSEX, CT - ASSIST. TOWN CLERK